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C O N F I D E N T I A L TAIPEI 004341

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W, INR/EAP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTION SCENE SETTER: PENGHU COUNTY

REF: TAIPEI 4158

Classified By: AIT ACTING DIRECTOR DAVID J. KEEGAN,
REASON(S): 1.4 (B/D)

1. (C) SUMMARY. DESPITE PENGHU'S LONG-STANDING REPUTATION AS SOLIDLY BLUE, OBSERVERS CALL THIS A NECK-AND-NECK RACE. THE GREGARIOUS DPP CANDIDATE CHEN KUANG-FU STARTED HIS CAMPAIGN FOR THIS ELECTION RIGHT AFTER LOSING THE LAST MAGISTERIAL ELECTION AND BY BUILDING UP HIS GRASSROOTS BASE IN PENGHU WITH AN EMPHASIS ON SEEING THAT DPP OFFICE PROVIDE FAST AND EFFECTIVE CONSTITUENT SERVICES, CHEN HAS BECOME A FORMIDABLE FOE TO THE DOMINANT KMT'S CANDIDATE WANG CHIEN-FA, A LACKLUSTER CIVIL SERVANT WHO IS BANKING ON JOINT CAMPAIGN APPEARANCES WITH KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU TO SECURE A WIN. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) BOTH THE KMT AND DPP READILY POINT OUT THAT THE DPP'S IMAGE SUFFERS GREATLY IN PENGHU DUE TO THE SEEMINGLY NON-STOP NEWS FROM AROUND TAIWAN DEPICTING DPP CORRUPTION AND CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE INCOMPETENCE. DESPITE A VISIT FROM PREMIER HSIEH CHANG-TING IN EARLY OCTOBER TO KICK OFF THE OPENING OF THE DPP CANDIDATE'S CAMPAIGN OFFICE, HARDLY ANY LOCALS SHOWED UP EVEN TO GET A CHANCE TO GLIMPSE HSIEH, WHO JUST MONTHS AGO WOULD HAVE BEEN A HUGE ATTRACTION FOR BOTH THE PARTY FAITHFUL AND THE CURIOUS.

3. (C) THE LACK OF WELL-WISHERS AT HSIEH'S APPEARANCE SURPRISED THE KMT COUNTY OFFICE, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE NOT LET DOWN THEIR GUARD YET. KNOWING THEIR CANDIDATE LACKS CAMPAIGNING SKILLS AND PERSONAL APPEAL, THEY ARE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR WAYS TO RAISE HIS PROFILE AMONG VOTERS. LIKE ELSEWHERE IN THE SOUTH, PENGHU'S KMT STRATEGY IS TO CONNECT THE LOCAL ELECTION TO THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, EMPHASIZING THAT KEEPING THE KMT IN PLACE LOCALLY WILL PROVIDE EASIER ACCESS TO THE REALMS OF TAIPEI'S HALLS OF POWER IF KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU TAKES THE PRESIDENCY.

4. (C) CHAIRMAN MA, WHO WAS IN PENGHU CAMPAIGNING ON OCTOBER 21, 2005, ATTRACTED RESPECTABLE CROWDS, ACCORDING TO THE LOCAL POLICE COMMISSIONER. UNFORTUNATELY, JUST TWO HOURS BEFORE HIS ARRIVAL TO HELP OPEN CANDIDATE WANG'S CAMPAIGN OFFICE, PENGHU PROSECUTORS RAIDED THE OFFICE AND SEIZED 56 TINS OF TEA LEAVES WHILE INVESTIGATING ALLEGED VOTE-BUYING ACTIVITIES. STILL, THE KMT OFFICE IS BANKING ON MA'S RETURN ON NOVEMBER 29 AND SEES THAT JOINT APPEARANCE LATE IN THE CAMPAIGN AS THE KEY TO ITS WIN.

5. (C) LIKE MOST DPP CAMPAIGN OFFICES, PENGHU'S DPP STRATEGY IS TO FOCUS ON ITS CANDIDATE'S PERSONAL QUALITIES, CHARACTER AND ABILITIES. SINCE LOSING THE MAGISTERIAL ELECTION IN 2001, CANDIDATE CHEN HASN'T STOPPED CAMPAIGNING FOR EVEN A DAY, SAY KMT OFFICIALS. HIS EFFORTS HAVE PAID OFF AND WON HIM IMPORTANT FRIENDSHIPS, EVEN IN THE OFFICES OF BLUE-LEANING INDEPENDENT LY MEMBER LIN PIN-KUAN. IN ADDITION, A LOCAL DISLIKE AMONG THE WORKING CLASS FOR INCUMBENT KMT MAGISTRATE LAI, SAY DPP OFFICIALS, FURTHER BOOSTS CHEN'S CHANCES FOR A WIN. SEEN AS A "SCHOLAR," MAGISTRATE LAI, A PH.D. IN ENGINEERING FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI, IS BERATED BY DPP OFFICIALS AS TAKING CREDIT FOR "BEAUTIFYING PENGHU" AND "LOWERING CRIME," NEITHER OF WHICH, THEY SAY, HE HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH. THEY BELIEVE LOCALS DISLIKE OF LAI'S ARROGANT ATTITUDE WILL TRANSFER DIRECTLY TO THE KMT CANDIDATE WANG, WHO IS NEITHER TELEGENIC NOR PERSONABLE.

6. (C) IN INITIAL CONVERSATIONS, THE DPP PLAYED DOWN THE "MA EFFECT," SAYING EARLY CAMPAIGN APPEARANCES WILL ONLY CAUSE A TEMPORARY SPIKE IN SUPPORT FOR THE KMT. HOWEVER, THE DPP LATER TOLD AIT/K THEY ARE EXTREMELY WORRIED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT CHAIRMAN MA WILL RETURN WITHIN A WEEK BEFORE THE DECEMBER 3 VOTE. THEY CLAIMED THAT MA'S IMAGE IS SO POPULAR IN THE TRADITIONALLY BLUE-LEANING PENGHU THAT A VISIT CLOSE TO VOTING WILL CERTAINLY MOVE ANY UNDECIDED VOTERS INTO THE BLUE CAMP. THE FACTOR THAT WORRIES THE DPP MOST, HOWEVER, IS THE WEATHER. A FINE DAY ON DECEMBER 3RD, WILL GUARANTEE THE FISHERMEN ARE AT SEA AND NOT AT THE POLLS. BOTH KMT AND DPP OFFICES BELIEVE RAIN AND ITS ACCOMPANYING HIGHER VOTER TURNOUT WILL BENEFIT THE DPP.

7 (C) COMMENT: THIS IS A VERY,VERY CLOSE RACE, IN WHICH INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE HSU CHING-MING ISN'T EVEN A FACTOR. AIT/K WILL FOLLOW DEVELOPMENTS, POLLS, AND THE WEATHER

CLOSELY. END COMMENT.
KEEGAN